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Access to Dental Care**How can I find out about charitable or low-cost dental care for persons in need?**

Assistance programs vary from state to state, so you may want to contact your [state dental society](#) to see if there are programs in your area.

Another possible source of lower-cost dental care is a dental school clinic. Generally, dental costs in school clinics are reduced and may include only partial payment for professional services covering the cost of materials and equipment. Your [state dental society](#) can tell you if there is a dental school clinic in your area, or you can [search our list](#).

For more resources, please visit the [National Institute of Health's](#) web site.

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Where can people with special needs obtain dental care?

The ADA Council on Access, Prevention and Interprofessional Relations suggests the following tips:

- Inform the dentist about your special health or financial conditions.
- Ask if the dentist has training and/or experience in treating patients with your specific condition.
- Ask if the dentist has an interest in treating patients with your specific condition.

- Find out if the dentist participates in your dental benefit plan (dental insurance program.)
- Ask if the dental facility is accessible to the disabled.

In addition, the Council suggests that patients with special needs

- Call or write the dental director at your [state department of public health](#).
- Contact the nearest [dental school clinic](#) or hospital dental department, especially if it is affiliated with a major university.
- Contact the [Special Care Dentistry](#) (Formerly Federation of Special Care Organizations in Dentistry, the [Academy of General Dentistry](#) and the [American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry](#) for a referral.
- Also, the [National Oral Health Information Clearinghouse](#) may have useful information.
- Contact the [National Foundation of Dentistry for the Handicapped](#) (NFDH), a charitable affiliate of the American Dental Association since 1988. The NFDH, via several programs, facilitates the provision of comprehensive dental care for needy disabled, elderly, and medically compromised individuals.
- Dentists and dental institutions organizing or participating in voluntary projects that care for uninsured and underserved patients will find information, and grant opportunities through [Volunteers in Health Care](#) (VIH). VIH Program staff are available to assist you at the toll-free number 1-877-844-8442.

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Choosing a Dentist

How do I find a dentist?

The American Dental Association offers these suggestions:

- Ask family, friends, neighbors or co-workers for recommendations.
- Ask your family physician or local pharmacist.
- If you're moving, your current dentist may be able to make a recommendation.
- Call or write your [local](#) or [state](#) dental society. Your local and state dental societies also may be listed in the telephone directory under "dentists" or "associations."
- Use ADA.org's [ADA Member Directory](#) to search for dentists in your area.

You may want to call or visit more than one dentist before making your decision. Dental care is a very personalized service that requires a good relationship between the dentist and the patient.

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What should I look for when choosing a dentist?

You may wish to consider several dentists before making your decision. During your first visit, you should be able to determine if this is the right dentist for you. Consider the following:

- Is the appointment schedule convenient for you?
- Is the office easy to get to from your home or job?
- Does the office appear to be [clean](#), neat and orderly?

- Was your medical and dental history recorded and placed in a permanent file?
- Does the dentist explain techniques that will help you prevent dental health problems? Is dental health instruction provided?
- Are special arrangements made for handling emergencies outside of office hours? (Most dentists make arrangements with a colleague or emergency referral service if they are unable to tend to emergencies.)
- Is information provided about fees and payment plans before treatment is scheduled?
- Is your dentist a member of the ADA? All ADA member dentists voluntarily agree to abide by the high ethical standards reflected in the [ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct](#) as a condition of their membership.

You and your dentist are partners in maintaining your oral health. Take time to ask questions and take notes if that will help you remember your dentist's advice.

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What is the difference between a DDS and a DMD?

The DDS (Doctor of Dental Surgery) and DMD (Doctor of Dental Medicine) are the same degrees. The difference is a matter of semantics. The majority of dental schools award the DDS degree; however, some award a DMD degree. The education and degrees are the same.

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Your Relationship with your Dentist

What does this treatment recommendation mean?

If you don't understand any part of what your dentist recommends, don't be afraid to ask for more information.

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Are other treatment options available?

You may want to ask your dentist the following:

- How do the options differ in cost?
- Which solution will last the longest?
- Do all the options solve the problem?

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Among the dentist's recommendations, which treatments are absolutely necessary? Which are elective? Which are cosmetic? Which procedures are urgently needed, and which ones are less urgent?

Your dentist should be able to prioritize a treatment schedule to help you distinguish problems needing immediate attention from those that are less urgent. Often, treatment can be phased in over time. Be sure you understand the consequences of delaying treatment.

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How much will this cost, and when and how are you expected to pay?

Does the dentist participate in your health plan? What method of payment does he or she expect? And when is payment due? Make sure you understand the fees, method and

schedule of payment before you agree to any treatment.

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Should I comparison shop?

Feel free to call around the community to compare such factors as location, office hours, fees and what arrangements will be made in case of emergency. If you are comparing fees, ask for estimates on full-mouth x-rays and a preventive dental visit that includes an oral exam and tooth cleaning.

If you have talked with your dentist and still are uncertain about what to do, get a second opinion. To find another dentist for a second opinion, call your [local dental society](#), or ask a relative or friend for referrals. If there is a dental school in your area, you may be able to make an appointment at the school's clinic. (See also: How to Find a Dentist.)

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How do I resolve disputes or complaints?

Even in the best dentist-patient relationship, a problem may occur. First, discuss any concerns you have with your dentist. Many times this will help clear up the matter. If you are still not pleased, contact your [state](#) or [local](#) dental association.

Local dental societies have established a dispute resolution system called peer review to help resolve the occasional disagreement about dental treatment. Peer review provides an impartial and easily accessible means for resolving misunderstandings regarding the appropriateness or quality of care and, in certain instances, about the fees charged for dental treatment.

A peer review committee will attempt to mediate the problem. They may meet to discuss the case and may examine clinical records, talk to the dentist and patient and, when indicated, arrange for a clinical examination.

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Can I get a copy of my dental records?

Talk with your dentist about getting a copy of your dental records. Dentists covered by the HIPAA privacy rule are required to provide patients with a copy of their records and state law may also apply.

[The ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct states:](#)

"A dentist has the ethical obligation on request of either the patient or the patient's new dentist to furnish, either gratuitously or for nominal cost, such dental records or copies or summaries of them, including dental X-rays or copies of them, as will be beneficial for the future treatment of that patient. This obligation exists whether or not the patient's account is paid in full."

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What if I want a second opinion?

To find another dentist for a second opinion, call your [local dental society](#), or ask a relative or friend for referrals. If there is a dental school in your area, you may be able to make an appointment at the school's clinic.

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What happens if I miss a dental appointment?

Dental offices vary on their policies of missed appointments. Ask your dentist about his or her policy. Many dentists ask that you call to cancel an appointment at least 24 hours in advance.

This will allow time for office staff to find someone else for your scheduled appointment. Those who don't call to cancel may be charged all or a portion of an office visit.

When should you cancel an appointment if you feel ill? If you feel up to the visit, keep it — unless you've got a fever, strep throat, can't breathe well or are too uncomfortable to sit in the chair. Some dentists also request patients to cancel if they have an active herpes virus or a cold sore around the mouth. If in doubt, ask your dentist if the visit should be rescheduled.

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Quick Links



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[Local Dental Society](#)

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